

April 17, 2004

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Michael K. Powell, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington DC

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Concerning RM-1087 through RM-10870

Dear Chairman Powell,

**ORIGINAL**

I know that your office does not ordinarily accept public comment on pending Commission rule changes. But there is one particular pending rule change issue which, I believe, has sufficient bearing on national security to be of concern the Commission Chairman.

The issue is that of the proposed reshaping of licensing standards for the Amateur Radio Service, which now governs the activities of nearly 700,000 radio hobbyists throughout the country. As part of this process, the Commission is being asked by various amateur radio lobbies to, among other things, sharply reduce or eliminate the longstanding amateur testing requirement of proficiency in the use of the International Morse Code.

The original reason for first making Morse proficiency a key part of Amateur Service licensing 70 years ago was to provide America with an embedded resource of citizens adept in a basic, worst-case form of radio communication, one which could come in handy in times of regional or national emergency.

Since 9/11/01, every American's concept of just what sort of emergencies can arise in today's world has shifted mightily. To keep pace with these realities, it is, I think, our collective duty to shore up our communications skills, not let them wither.

As an amateur operator for more than 30 years, I can testify that Morse Code communication is often possible when voice communication is not. The transmission of simple Morse dots and dashes is low-tech, can punch through high interference levels and can be heard over great distances at very low power, such as might be the case from a disaster zone when battery power is all there is. I have communicated many times with other amateurs at distances of over 1,000 miles using just 1 or 2 watts of power. Each such contact is a reminder to me how valuable Morse code is, and how important it is that it remain standard knowledge in the amateur community. In this age of terrorism, it is not a leap to see the retention of code proficiency as a national security issue.

I respectfully recommend to the Commission a code proficiency standard of 5 words per minute for Novices, 13 wpm for General Class amateurs and 20 wpm for Extra Class amateurs. I further propose an end to the current system of test-free, 10-year license renewals in favor of a system under which amateurs are retested every five years.

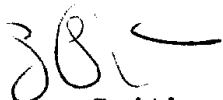
It is true that some other countries are eliminating code proficiency entirely as an amateur radio licensing requirement. But we are not just another country. We are the United States of America. No other nation has a target on its back as big as ours.

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I urge the Federal Communications Commission to restore amateur radio to its former status as a complete emergency communications resource, whose practitioners are well-versed in all forms of radio communication, including simple telegraphy. Now more than ever, amateurs need to be of value to their nation.

With sincere thanks,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W. Smith', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Wayne Smith  
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